United Nations A/73/444

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 October 2018

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventy-third session
Agenda item 128 (z)
Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations: cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

Letter dated 16 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the joint statement of the summit of the Council of Heads of the Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea held in the Avaza national tourist area in Turkmenbashi, Turkmenistan, on 24 August 2018 (see annex).*

I would be very grateful if you could kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 128 (z).

(*Signed*) Aksoltan **Ataeva**
Permanent Representative

* The annex is being circulated in the languages of submission only.

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Annex to the letter dated 16 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and Russian]

Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of the Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

On 24 August 2018, in the city of Turkmenbashi, a meeting of the Council of heads of the founder States of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea was held, with the participation of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, the President of Turkmenistan, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, on the invitation of the President of Turkmenistan.

In an atmosphere of friendship and mutual understanding, the heads of State discussed a wide range of issues of cooperation in further improving the water management, environmental and socioeconomic situation in the Aral sea basin, and also noted the significant contribution made by the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) over the 25 years of its existence.

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to the previously adopted decisions on the joint and integrated management and rational use of water resources and protection of the environment in the Aral sea basin, taking into account the interests of all the countries of the region on the basis of the principles of good-neighbourliness and mutual respect.

The Presidents stressed the need to further develop and strengthen equal and mutually beneficial cooperation in the use and protection of inter-State watercourses in the spirit of the centuries-old friendship among the peoples, who have deep historical roots and a commonality of culture, customs and traditions.

The heads of State welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolution 72/273, of 12 April 2018, on cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea, resolution 72/283, of 22 June 2018, entitled "Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region" and also resolution 71/222, of 21 December 2016, entitled "International Decade for Action 'Water for Sustainable Development' 2018–2028".

The Presidents highlighted the significance of the agreements reached during the meeting of the IFAS Board held on 30 January 2018 in Ashgabat.

The heads of State noted the importance of the development of the programme of action for providing assistance to the countries of the Aral sea basin (Aral Sea Basin Programme — ASBP-4) in consolidating the efforts and capacities of the States of the region and the international community with a view to tackling the common priority water management, environmental and socioeconomic issues of the Aral sea basin.

The participants stressed the similarity of approaches to resolving key issues on the Aral sea basin agenda, including the development of the programme of action for providing assistance to the countries of the Aral sea basin, which was incorporated in the conceptual framework adopted for the formulation of ASBP-4.

The heads of State expressed concern about the worsening of the Aral crisis and its adverse consequences, the growing number and intensity of weather events and

the accelerated melting of glaciers associated with global climate change and urged United Nations agencies, and international and regional organizations, to cooperate in resolving these problems.

The participants recognized the importance of consolidating efforts to achieve an integrated solution to the problems involved in improving the socioeconomic and environmental situation in the Aral sea basin, especially in areas which have been subjected to environmental stress.

The participants stressed the need to adopt coordinated measures to reduce water and atmospheric pollution and land degradation, promote afforestation, lessen the risk of natural disasters, including floods, landslides and droughts, ensure clean drinking water and so forth.

The heads of State noted the significance of the outcomes of the Dushanbe high-level Conference on the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" 2018–2028, the Central Asian International Environmental Forum and the Tashkent international conference "Joint action to mitigate the consequences of the Aral catastrophe: new approaches, innovative solutions, investments" for expanding cooperation between the countries of the region with a view to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Presidents welcomed the development of the regional environmental protection programme for the sustainable development of Central Asia, aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing the United Nations environmental conventions, developing the principles of the green economy and adapting to climate change.

The heads of State noted the need to consider the possible formulation of a special United Nations programme for the Aral sea basin and requested the Executive Committee of IFAS to hold consultations on this matter with the States of the region and with States Members of the United Nations and its agencies.

The Presidents discussed the possibility of the accession of the countries of the region to the Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development of Central Asia, of 22 November 2006.

The heads of State, bearing in mind their common interest in the integrated and rational use of water and energy resources in Central Asia, and noted the importance of the hydropower facilities under construction in transboundary watercourses, taking into account the interests of all the countries of the region and in accordance with the international principles and norms to which the States of the region have adhered, to promoting the socioeconomic development of the Aral sea basin.

The participants noted the importance of the agreement among the heads of the water management agencies of the founder States of IFAS on carrying out joint work to attract donors for automation of the water management stations throughout the Syr Darya river basin.

Kazakhstan proposed that efforts should be undertaken to establish a stable regional mechanism for integrated use of the hydropower resources of Central Asia.

The Presidents expressed their willingness to further improve the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS in order to establish an efficient and stable institutional mechanism that is capable of responding in a timely manner to new challenges, and also to facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation in the implementation of regional projects and programmes for saving the Aral, environmental recovery of the Aral region and the Aral sea basin, and also integrated use and protection of the water resources of transboundary watercourses, water management, energy and socioeconomic development.

The heads of State noted the importance of the regional youth movement for safeguarding water resources and protecting the environment as a means of ensuring the participation of the younger generation in responding to contemporary challenges and threats.

Uzbekistan proposed that, in order to enhance the human and scientific capacity of the region, joint training and refresher training for technicians in the sphere of water resources and environmental protection and also joint interdisciplinary research should be organized through the Tashkent institute for irrigation engineering and agricultural mechanization, in cooperation with leading higher educational institutions of States of the region.

The participants requested the IFAS Board to draw up a plan of action for the practical implementation of the agreements reached and to monitor its implementation.

The heads of State, regarding IFAS as a universal platform for cooperation among the countries of the region in resolving a wide range of issues of regional significance, including through implementation of regional projects and programmes for environmental recovery and improvement of the socioeconomic situation in the Aral sea basin, expressed a willingness to further expand cooperation in this regard.

The participants expressed appreciation to Turkmenistan for the high level of organization of the meeting of the Council of heads of the founder States of the International Fund for saving the Aral and for the hospitality extended.

Turkmenbashi, 24 August 2018